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UNCLAS MUSCAT 000113

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [SOCI](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: OMAN ONLINE: AMENDING LAWS REGULATING FOREIGN WORKERS
AND FORCED ENTRY INTO PRIVATE HOMES

1. Summary: The Omani Internet chat room "Sablat al-Arab" -- or simply "Al-Sablah" -- is the liveliest and most comprehensive Arabic-language forum for political and social discourse in the country, touching on issues and personalities rarely addressed in the conventional media. While not totally free, nor wholly reflective of Omani public opinion, Al-Sablah nevertheless offers a worthwhile window into the hot topics and unvarnished views of the day. This edition of Oman Online contains the following topics:

--- America demands that Gulf States amend laws relating to foreign workers

--- Storming houses and arresting citizens

End summary.

U.S. Criticism Spurs Public Outcry

2. Al-Sablah members reacted strongly to recent comments attributed to Catherine Novelli, Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Europe & the Mediterranean, stating, "Oman and the UAE need to improve their laws concerning the expatriates residing within their borders, if they desire to continue with the Free Trade Agreements (FTA)." Several al-Sablah participants wondered, "Why is she only focusing on the expatriates? There are a lot of Omanis who suffer from the employment practices of private companies in Oman who exclude Omanis to hire cheaper expatriate labor. Where is the outcry on behalf of Omanis, there are no laws protecting the Omani labor force either? How can she make these accusations of Oman when the U.S. is no better at protecting foreign workers in its territories and has more human rights cases than Oman. I am growing weary of this never ending American hypocrisy." Others members commented, "Why do Americans continually interfere in the internal affairs of other countries? Our labor issues are of no concern to America. Don't they see that Oman is doing the best it can to accommodate international employment law?" Another participant wrote, "For Ms. Novelli to describe the expatriate employment law in Oman as 'the worst internationally' is unfair and completely untrue! However, we deserve this criticism because we have opened the door for the U.S. to meddle in our internal matters, by our willingness to cooperate with them."

Hauling in Imams

3. Another topic discussed in al-Sablah recently refers to recent reports of police raids on the private homes of religious conservatives. One Sablah member commented, "God help this country! How can our society have dissolved so far as to allow these types of heinous acts to be perpetrated against our sheiks?" Many participants speculated on the reasons for the raids suggesting, "The recent events are because the Omani special security forces that have discovered evidence of a terrorist cells in one of the interior regions." Another member in opposition to this claim stated, "These actions have no basis in fact! They found no contraband, no arms, no drugs, they found nothing! The security forces just wanted to scare our bearded religious leaders." A large number of participants opined, "These disgraceful acts only took place because of the Americans, and the pressure they are exerting over other countries, in their 'war on terrorism'."

BALTIMORE